



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 5-311 Box 50187, Honolulu, HI 96850
Phone: 808 792-9530 Fax: 808 792-9583

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Contact: Barbara Maxfield, 808 792-9531 or 753-0440

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Unexpected Feathered Guests Find a Welcome on National Wildlife Refuges

Word is getting out . . . National Wildlife Refuges make pretty nice homes, or better yet, vacation destinations! As the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service commemorates its annual National Wildlife Refuge Week, refuge managers throughout Hawaii are celebrating the arrival of several new bird species during the past year.

“Our National Wildlife Refuges in the Pacific are often small remnants of wetland habitats or tiny islets and reefs in the midst of a vast ocean, but that makes them all the more important to migratory birds,” explained Barry Stieglitz, Project Leader for Pacific island refuges. “Our proverbial welcome mat is always out for wildlife, but it’s particularly exciting to see new species find these special places.”

Some of the new arrivals to refuges – and in some cases to Hawaii – this year include an American avocet, marbled godwits, white-faced ibises, curlew sandpipers, and a Nazca booby. A what, you say?

The Nazca booby (*Sula granti*) was considered a masked booby until 1998, when it was recognized as a separate species. Commonly found in the Galapagos Islands and on Malpelo Island in Colombia, the first sighting of the species in Hawaii was at Tern Island in the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge in July. Like its cousin the masked booby, Nazca boobies are all white with black on the edges of their wings and tail. But instead of a yellow bill, this species has a bright orange bill that is more tapered than that of a masked booby.

“Nazca boobies are highly pelagic and occasionally stray to the California coast, but we were quite surprised to hear from volunteer Linda Takahashi that we had a masked booby with an orange beak on Tern Island,” said Beth Flint, senior seabird biologist for the Service’s Pacific Remote Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex. “Fortunately, she caught a great photo of the bird, which several seabird biologists confirmed was a Nazca booby.”

The Nazca booby apparently thought Tern Island was a nice vacation spot, for it stayed on the island for more than two weeks before taking off in early August.

Another first for Hawaii was a sighting of an American avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*) last month at Kealia Pond National Wildlife Refuge on Maui. This wetland bird is shaped similarly to a Hawaiian stilt, though it is slightly larger. In nonbreeding plumage, adults have a grayish head, neck, and chest, but during breeding season, the gray turns to a

soft rust color. Perhaps its most distinctive feature is its long upturned bill, which it swings through shallow water to catch small invertebrates.

American avocets normally winter in along the California and southeastern United States coastlines, and in Mexico. Their summer breeding range is mostly in the western Great Plains. “This sighting created quite a stir in the birding community,” said Refuge Manager Glynnis Nakai. “There’s always an air of anticipation each winter as we wait to see what migratory birds will make their way to Hawaii’s National Wildlife Refuges!”

Marbled godwits (*Limosa fedoa*) – a large shorebird that also has a slightly upturned bill – are termed “accidental stragglers” to Hawaii, but they are rarely seen. From January to April, one was seen at Kealia Pond National Wildlife Refuge. The same bird is believed to have moved on to the Gathering Place on Oahu, where it was sighted at James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge on May 9. This is the first sighting ever reported on the Refuge, where it has taken up residence in the Kii Unit. Its vacation is an extended one . . . it’s still there!

The marbled godwit breeds in the northern Great Plains in the United States and Canada, but typically spends its winters along the coastlines of the United States and Mexico. The bird is a rich cinnamon brown with a distinctive bill with a dark tip and pink base.

Another species may be island-hopping as well . . . a curlew sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*) observed at Kealia Pond National Wildlife Refuge in January may be one of two that arrived at James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge in May. This medium-sized sandpiper is a Eurasian species rarely seen in Hawaii. It nests on tundra and occasionally migrates to the East Coast but is rare on the West Coast.

The first white-faced ibis (*Plegadis chihi*) to visit Pearl Harbor National Wildlife Refuge on Oahu spent last winter enjoying refuge hospitality. A second, younger bird arrived this week at James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge. Normally this species winters in southern California, southern Texas, southern Louisiana, and Mexico. Its breeding grounds include more northern areas of the United States and southeastern portions of South America. This dark wading bird has a long, down-curved bill.

“We’ve had several other unusual visitors this year, including whimbrel, a peregrine falcon, osprey, greater white-fronted goose, cackling geese, and a tufted duck here on James Campbell or Pearl Harbor refuges,” said Sylvia Pelizza, refuge manager for all three National Wildlife Refuges on Oahu.

“James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge reopens for public tours on October 15th, so we invite folks to come look for not only these unusual visiting birds, but also our four endangered Hawaiian waterbirds,” Pelizza continued. “These refuges were established to protect the endangered ae’o, ‘alaie ke’oke’o, ‘alaie ‘ula, and koloa, but they seem happy to share their habitat with other migratory birds. A record 27 rare bristle-thighed curlews came to James Campbell this year, and 16 of them stayed through the summer!”

Guided tours at James Campbell will be offered Thursdays and Saturdays from October 15th through February 18th. The Thursday tours begin at 4 p.m., and Saturday tours

alternate between 9 a.m. starts and 3:30 p.m. starts. Reservations are required and may be obtained by calling the Oahu Refuge office at 637-6330.

Kealia Pond National Wildlife Refuge on Maui is open to the public for self-guided tours during normal working hours. Call their office at 808 875-1582 for more information.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service celebrates National Wildlife Refuge Week every October, this year from October 9-15. In conjunction with Refuge Week, the Service has released a new report entitled *Banking on Nature 2004: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation*. The report found that national wildlife refuges are major economic engines for many communities, putting almost \$1.4 billion into the economy. This total economic activity related to national wildlife refuge recreational use is nearly four times the \$391 million that the Refuge System received in fiscal year 2004 for operations and maintenance.

Moreover, the National Wildlife Refuge System created nearly 24,000 private sector jobs as the \$1.4 billion flowed through the economy, generating about \$454 million in employment income. Additionally, recreational spending on national wildlife refuges generated nearly \$151 million in tax revenue at the local, county, state and federal level.

The *Banking on Nature 2004* study included money spent for food and refreshments, lodging at motels, cabins, lodges or campgrounds, and transportation when it calculated the total economic activity related to refuge recreational use.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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Note to Editors: Photographs of the Nazca booby and American avocet are available by calling Barbara Maxfield at 808 792-9531 or clicking on the following links. [Avocet stilt](#) [Nazca booby](#)